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Security Council Unanimous on Ending Mideast Hostilities
(Rice calls resolution "a good first step" to help Lebanon, Israel) (1420)

By Judy Aita
Washington File United Nations Correspondent

United Nations -- The U.N. Security Council has unanimously adopted a resolution calling for an immediate end to the fighting between Hezbollah and Israel and authorized an expanded U.N. peacekeeping force to help the Lebanese army take control of southern Lebanon as Israel withdraws.

The council also imposed a total arms embargo on all weapons going into Lebanon except those for use by the government of Lebanon.

Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora said his government, which includes two Hezbollah ministers, had agreed unanimously to the resolution. The Israeli cabinet will consider the resolution on August 13.

In a statement issued from his ranch in Crawford, Texas, President Bush welcomed the resolution. "The loss of innocent life in both Lebanon and Israel has been a great tragedy. Hezbollah and its Iranian and Syrian sponsors have brought an unwanted war to the people of Lebanon and Israel, and millions have suffered as a result. I now urge the international community to turn words into action and make every effort to bring lasting peace to the region," the president said.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called the resolution "a first step, but a good first step" in dealing with the fighting and turbulent political situation.

In many respects, the hard work of diplomacy is just beginning, Rice told the 15-nation Security Council before voting on August 11. "Though it is our hope that this resolution will lead to the cessation of large-scale hostilities, no one should expect an immediate end to all acts of violence.

"The conditions of a lasting peace must be nurtured over time, with the goodwill of the Lebanese and Israeli government, and with the sustained commitment of the international community," she said.

Through the resolution, the council attempts to get an immediate end to the fighting that has killed over a thousand and displaced close to one million people. The resolution tries to set out a series of steps leading to a permanent cease-fire and long-term solution. One of the most difficult points in drafting the

resolution was devising a way to ensure that Hezbollah does not re-infiltrate the area once Israel withdraws.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that over the weekend he will work with both parties to fix the exact date and time when the cessation of hostilities will come into effect.

The council asked the secretary-general to report back in one week on how the resolution was being implemented.

The most pressing challenge now "is to help the thousands of displaced people within Lebanon to return to their homes and rebuild their lives. The reconstruction of Lebanon will be led by the government of Lebanon, but it will demand the generosity of the entire international community," Rice said.

The United States, the secretary said, will be increasing its immediate assistance to Lebanon to \$50 million.

Rice demanded other nations stop interfering in Lebanon and called on every state "especially Iran and Syria, to respect the sovereignty of the Lebanese government and the will of the international community" regarding the embargo on all weapons heading into the country without the government's consent.

Hezbollah and its sponsors have brought devastation upon the people of Lebanon dragging them into a war they did not choose and exploiting them as human shields, the secretary of state said.

"The people of the Middle East have lived for too long at the mercy of extremists," she said. "It is time to build a more hopeful future and this resolution shows us the way.

"It is now the solemn responsibility of the international community to help the people of Lebanon and Israel to transform this tragedy into opportunity -- an opportunity to overcome old patterns of violence and to build a new foundation for stable and sustainable peace," she said.

The resolution calls for "a full cessation of hostilities" based upon "the immediate cessation by Hezbollah of all attacks and the immediate cessation by Israel of all offensive military operations." "In parallel" once the fighting ends, Israel is to withdraw from southern Lebanon as a 15,000-force Lebanese army -- with the help of the 15,000 troops of an expanded U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) -- moves into the area all the way to the Lebanese-Israeli border, known as the Blue Line.

Lebanon must take control of the south "so that there will be no weapons without the consent of the government of Lebanon and no authority other than that of the government of Lebanon," the resolution states.

Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's pledge to send 15,000 Lebanese forces to the south was crucial in helping negotiators work out an agreement after days of intense efforts to draw up the four-page, 19-point resolution.

The council stressed the importance of not just ending the violence but addressing the cause of the crisis "including the unconditional release of the abducted Israeli soldiers." It encourages efforts to settle the issue of Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel but does not explicitly call for a prisoner exchange.

In an interview with CNN after the adoption of the resolution, Rice said: "The return of the Israeli soldiers should be unconditional. And that has been stated in numerous documents. It's stated in this document. There is a sensitive issue about Lebanese prisoners. But I want to be clear. There isn't a linkage here and there is no prisoner exchange that is even envisioned in this resolution."

UNIFIL -- with its expanded number of troops and better equipment -- will not only monitor the cessation of hostilities and support the Lebanese army, but also will help ensure that humanitarian aid reaches civilians and assist the safe return of displaced civilians.

In the resolution, the council authorized UNIFIL "to take all necessary action ... as it deems within its capabilities to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind (and) to resist attempts by forceful means to prevent it from discharging its duties." It extended UNIFIL's mandate for one year.

A permanent cease-fire and long-term solution will be established based on full respect for the Blue Line; security arrangements to prevent the resumption of hostilities; the establishment of a buffer zone between the Blue Line and the Litani River "free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the government of Lebanon and UNIFIL"; disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, and providing maps of minefields in Lebanon to the United Nations, the council said.

Within 30 days, the secretary-general is to present plans for implementing the council resolutions and the Taif Accords; the delineation of Lebanon's international border, including the contested Shebaa farms area; and the disarming of militias.

The resolution, Rice said, lays the foundation for a durable cease-fire and a decisive change from the status quo that produced the war.

The Security Council has said that it intends to adopt another resolution with further measures to help the cease-fire become permanent, the secretary noted.

While welcoming the resolution, Secretary-General Annan criticized the council for not calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities "much, much earlier."

"I am convinced that my disappointment and sense of frustration are shared by hundreds of millions of people around the world," Annan said.

In an interview with Fox News, Rice said: "We always wanted this to happen as quickly as possible, but the conditions had to be there so that you can't have a state within a state again going across the Blue Line, attacking Israel, and then causing – sort of plunging the region into chaos."

Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassem Al Thani of Qatar said that Arab nations would be submitting a formal request for a Security Council ministerial meeting in September to work out a new regional peace plan.

The resolution, drafted by the United States and France, was also co-sponsored by Denmark, Ghana, Greece, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom. In addition to U.S. Secretary of State Rice, the foreign ministers of France, Denmark, Greece, Ghana, Qatar and the United Kingdom attended the meeting.

Secretary Rice's statement (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/70349.htm>) and transcripts of her interviews with CBS (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/70316.htm>), CNN (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/70315.htm>), Fox (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/70318.htm>), and NBC (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/70317.htm>) can be found on the State Department Web site.

For the full text of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 (<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2006/sc8808.doc.htm>), visit the United Nations Web site.

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